DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 308 143 SP 031 203

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TITLE "In Medias Res": Good for Greek Drama but Not Necessarily Good for Pre-service Language Arts Interns.
PUB DATE 27 Mar 89
NOTE 26p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (San Francisco, CA, March 27-31, 1989).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Reports - Research/Technical (143)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Cooperating Teachers; *Decision Making; Higher Education; *Planning; Preservice Teacher Education; Program Length; *Scheduling; Secondary Education; Student Teacher Attitudes; *Student Teaching; Teaching Conditions; *Time Management

ABSTRACT

This study examined the time constraints imposed on teacher interns by the fact that they enter a classroom already established and owned by a cooperating teacher and leave the scene before the actual year-end closure. Participants in the study were eight secondary language arts student interns. Separate case studies were completed for each intern, based on structured and unstructured interviews, journal accounts, classroom observations, and a preliminary questionnaire. Two aspects of planning driven by time were identified: (1) the rhythm of school, the constraints of time, and instructional pacing, i.e., technical control; and (2) planning by thematic units, activities, and daily plans. The participants felt that the 14-week internship was too short to develop the interpersonal relationships identified as critical to teaching, and too long to be in another teacher's classroom. (JD)

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ED308143

In Medias Res:
Good for Greek Drama but not Necessarily Good for Pre-service Language Arts Interns

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Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, March 27, 1989, San Francisco, CA.

In part, this research was supported by a dissertation grant award from the School Division of the American Association of Publishers, New York, New York. The opinions expressed are those of the author and do not necessarily represent those of the AAP.

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Introduction

In medias res is a Latin phrase meaning "in the middle of things". It refers to narrative that begins in the thick of the action or plot, rather than its chronological beginning. In medias res captures the instructional, social, and cultural position of a student or intern teacher who culminates pre-service, professional preparation by stepping into a classroom another (the cooperating teacher) has ordered. Likewise, the pre-service teacher leaves the scene, much as he or she arrived--in the middle of things.

For teaching-interns, like anyone else in the setting, school is an institutional environment marked by invariate beginnings, invariate endings, and numerous chronologies. The following references to time are representative:

-- school openings, anchored by Labor Day
-- commencements, anchored by Memorial Day
-- a 190 day school year, exclusive of blizzards, heat, or violent storms
-- 18 week semesters
-- nine week grading periods
-- five day weeks, schools days subdivided by hours
-- first hour, last hour, lunch hour, detention hour
-- time-out
-- time-on-task
-- time management
-- managing instruction and curriculum through the curriculum by means of two and three week units of study
-- experience (measured time on or at the job)

By entering and exiting the classroom in medias res, one of a student-intern's chief lessons of a pre-service teaching experience is attending to the seemingly immutable features of schooling. Zeichner, Tabachnick and Densmore (1987) identify

those features as technical constraints at a cultural level of analysis. They are not the psychological theories or teaching-learning methods emphasized in teacher training.

Reported here are findings specific to institutional or technical constraints of time. The paper is based on a non-experimental study investigating intern teachers' reflections about learning-to-teach. The study linked psychological contexts of teaching, e.g., teaching beliefs and values, with planning or instructional decision-making within the social and institutional contexts of school, i.e., ownership, authority, and the constraints of time, or technical control.

Review of literature

The inclusion of two separate chapters in the most recent edition of the Handbook of Research on Teaching (Wittrock, 1986) documents a growing research interest in the way teachers and students think about the learning process in school settings. The acknowledgement that teaching may be represented most appropriately through an ecological examination of natural settings is a significant reconceptualization of the learning-to-teach process, in particular, studies of teaching that identify the complexity of teaching-learning environments.

Different from survey studies of general teacher attitudes and beliefs, or experimental inquiry that Dunkin and Biddle (1974) label process-product research, a focus on the personal theorizing of teachers (Connelly & Clandinin, 1984; Cornett,

1988; Elbaz, 1983) yields a research base characterized broadly as teachers' implicit theories (see Calderhead, 1987, for representative studies and discussion). Teacher thinking studies are investigations usually set in the natural environment of teaching. In situ inquiries provide a rich narrative depicting the work of teachers. In part, the narrative of teaching is examined through self report, e.g., stimulated recall based on video taped observations; in depth, structured and unstructured interviews as well as other techniques such journals, detailed field notes, and participant observation (Jacob, 1987).

One result of this research focus is evidence that teachers identified as experts and novices experience teaching differently (Berliner, 1987; Clift, 1988; Fogarty, Wang, & Creek, 1983; Lavely, Berger, Bullock, Follman, Kromrey, & Sawilowsky, 1987). To complete the picture of teaching, this growing data base requires the documentation and exploration of the effects of field experiences on pre-service teachers. Equally important are the effects a teacher-in-training has on his or her cooperating and supervising teachers and the teaching setting.

Method

Participants. Participants in the investigation included eight (four females, four males) secondary language arts student-interns. Seven of the interns were 22 or 23 years old at the time of the study. The eighth participant was 31 years old. The teaching placements represented all of the language arts areas,

e.g., senior high (grades 10-12) composition, literature, grammar, and speech/forensics, and junior high (grades 7-9) reading, writing, grammar, and spelling. All of the teaching-interns were assigned to cooperating teachers in different buildings which represented six different school districts. Communities in which the teaching-interns taught included inner city, suburban, small city, and rural schools.

A 14-week teaching internship was one of the final requirements for certification. It was the second major field experience (six weeks of student teaching preceded the teaching internship) of a five year teacher education program. A 14-week internship anchored the seven month data collection period. Interns had completed baccalaureate degrees prior to both field experiences.

Study Design and Data Analysis. Separate case studies were completed for each intern, based on key data sources, i.e., structured and unstructured interviews, twice-weekly journal accounts, classroom observations, and a preliminary questionnaire surveying demographic data and teaching beliefs/ideas (Yin, 1989). The eight case studies were then subjected to pattern-matching (Yin, 1989). This yielded an analytic generalization of the epistemology of practice verbalized by a language arts intern.

As per non-experimental research methods (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Yin, 1989), data were collected over a long enough period of time (seven

months) to meet the criterion of saturation, i. e., incoming data were not suggesting additional or discrepant themes. The previous methods served to triangulate the findings. Triangulation is a process of collecting data which represent multiple perspectives of the same phenomenon to build a trustworthy and credible case (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

A constant-comparative method guided data analysis (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Data were collected, analyzed, and presented in a manner consistent with one of the assumptions of naturalistic inquiry (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), i.e., the research participants were co-investigators.

The trustworthiness of on-going data analysis was established by informal member checking throughout the study. Formal member-checks occurred at the conclusion of the investigation, when interns read their individual case studies for accuracy of interpretation. Corrections were made, with final reactions by the interns included in an appendix to the major study (Kleinsasser, 1988). As suggested by Lincoln & Guba (1975), an audit trail was created. Analgous to a financial audit, records kept by the investigator throughout the course of the study permitted an external review of the data and data analysis procedures. One set of data was selected randomly for an external review for trustworthiness of analytic conclusions. An investigator, familiar with the qualitative and analytic methods used here, read for general categories and themes. A draft of the case study was submitted for inspection as well. Analytic

findings from the outside review identified the same categories and conclusions of the investigator's findings.

Analytic Results. Constant-comparative analyses of observations, journals, interviews, and field notes yielded eight separate case studies. Table 1 depicts the unique themes of each teaching-intern's knowledge of practice.

Table 1 about here.

At the next level of analysis, the case studies were subjected to pattern-matching. This yielded analytic generalizations about the knowledge of practice of the language arts teaching-interns. Pattern-matching revealed three undergirding themes across cases. See Table 2.

Table 2 about here.

Two aspects of planning driven by time can be identified. They are a) the rhythm of school, the constraints of time, and instructional pacing, what Zeichner, Tabachnick, and Densmore (1987) call technical control, and b) planning by thematic units, activities, and daily plans.

Technical Control

The intern teachers in the study described their two field experiences in the same way: whether a six-week student-teaching

experience or a 14-week student-internship, the field experience was too short to develop the interpersonal relationships the student-interns identified as critical to teaching (one of the three undergirding themes emerging from the larger study) but too long to be in another teacher's room.

Says Simon[1]:

> I'm ready to get out and see If I can accomplish more that way, rather than borrowing someone else's room and picking up a class in the middle of a year...

Identifying time as the source of considerable frustration, specifically, slow starts on Monday mornings, spring break disrupting the rhythm of instruction, Terry describes time as a barrier to interpersonal relationships with a student:

> I'd like for him to come to me and talk to me about it [student's family problem is affecting school work] but at this point I don't see that happening. Just, for one thing he doesn't [know] me very well because, you know, I just, I've been in that class a few weeks now and we ... we, I think our relationship, with all the classes is growing stronger every day, but, I think it takes a while to form a relationship that's strong enough for him, a student to...come to a teacher and, and ask for help about problems...that are so personal like this one.

Time is also a factor in building relationships with faculty members, according to Terry:

> I think time played a role. I was not there [student teaching site] as long, I can't get to know the staff as well. . . I think I mentioned that I felt more comfortable with my school during my internship just because it seemed like I was accepted more as a member of the faculty. And again, time could have something to do with that.

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[1]All names are pseudonyms.

In an institutional setting where a smooth operation functions chiefly by being on time and staying on time, coming into the social setting of a classroom in medias res was disruptive for all of the student-interns. Feeling out of place, neither student nor teacher, was exacerbated by learning names and institutional or classroom routines well after they had been established for everyone else in the learning setting. Relative to instruction or curricular decisions, interns articulated their confusion or philosophical conflict in getting a sense of goals and objectives for the class (Anne, Linus, Simon) and/or their acceptance of the status quo for 14 weeks (Chris, Greaser, Ilsa, Sean, Terry). The result was the same. Interns reasoned that they would do things their own way when they were real teachers, having their own classes, being in control and responsible.

Leaving before the semester's natural completion was awkward and difficult. They hurried to complete units (i.e., finish reading books) mark and return papers, and record grades. Most of the teaching-interns missed the end-of-the-year ceremonies that formalized school's closure for both student and teacher, e.g., commencement, the prom, field trips, classroom parties, general clean up work. Not insignificantly, it is at events like commencement that teachers are acknowledged and thanked by the school and civic communities for their service to students. Two teaching-interns participated in closing activities. Terry attended an end of the year banquet for teachers, and Linus, the prom.

Planning Driven by Time

A second category of time relates to instructional planning. Says Anne, "...in my own classroom, I want to know at the beginning of the year, what kind of goals we have for the end of the year and there's a progression, if I work toward those goals instead of going back and forth and just kind of messing around like we do now."

More specifically, Anne acknowledges pressure to move through the curriculum:

> We did a practice test and we could see the things that they did wrong and, you know, my teacher had said at one time that, "Well, I think we should go over and do some of those things," and I think that could be used effectively. I mean, because we knew what their weaknesses were and we could teach those kind of things. But, we never did it. I mean, she said, "No, we need to get into the story, and so, it was kind of lost by the wayside and how we're going into the full test and they still haven't learned anything that we knew they didn't know from the practice test.

Timing is a key to successful lessons, as illustrated by Greaser's depiction of planning and implementing a lesson--what will fit into a 45 or 50 minute class:

> I hesitate to say that the lesson has to fit the time structure . . . I think it's probably better to, if you can, to make it fit, just because that's simply the way it is...

Similarly, Linus says,

> I was hampered a little ... if this would have been my class, I would have had the whole semester planned out before I walked into the room, which I didn't, you know, I pretty much just plan a week at a time, and I think that...or from day to day sometimes. I think that's been a lot of extra stress, having to every night, plan a lesson for the first time and not know if it's going to work, having no idea if it's going to be a success...

Continuing, Linus links experience and belonging (definitions of real teachers) to time in the classroom:

> ...maybe I just never feel like a teacher, now, because I don't have my own room, I don't have my own mailbox. It sounds really stupid. That's not why I want to be a teacher, so I can I have my own mailbox . . . It's just stuff like that may make you feel like you belong and you should be there . . . It's not like I own the kids, or anything, but I own the class to the extent that they are solely my own responsibility and I'm there from start to finish. Right now, to the kids, I'm ... some big kid that hangs around.

Simon struggles to cram several centuries of literature into two and three week units for his senior high students:

> I'm trying to work up some units . . . My cooperating teacher wants the class to read Lord of the Flies for the regular English classes, so she said that will probably take about three weeks with all the activities and stuff, so I need to come up . . . I have three weeks of my regular classes to cover three ... well, two centuries, three different eras in English literature: Enlightenment, Romantic Period, and one I really like with Hopkins and Hardy.

A novice teacher's problem-solving can be seen in the following excerpt describing a complicated plan gone awry. Simon creates a mini-uproar when he addresses a problem of too little time, too few books, and what he identifies as too little motivation on the part of students.

> I thought it was a good idea at the time. Famous last words of a student teacher. What prompted the action was at least two-fold. First, students have not been paying attention as we read The Chocolate War. I have to constantly prod them, scold them to keep their heads off the desks, their eyes open. Very few want to participate in reading aloud. I get tired of doing it all and besides, students zonk out and I have to constantly stop and get their attention. So part of it is their fault. Second, the [novel] is taking forever to get through. At the rate we were going, we would spend two more weeks just reading the book. No way I was going to fight my students to make them read that

long. It would have been better if there were enough copies of the book for both classes. As it is, there is barely enough for one. So we have to read in class. I can't assign the students to read certain chapters at home. This is a real problem. Besides, my basic students, which is what these are, most probably wouldn't read at home anyway.

This brings me to my bright idea. There are enough chapters left in the book for each student to read one and report to the class on it. I had an outline that told the students to summarize what the chapter is about, tell how each character is described in that chapter, and then for the student to give his or her own reaction or comments about that chapter. I would give each student thirty points for a well-presented talk on his/her chapter. Additionally, students could earn 70 pts. by taking notes on the presentations of others. All of this should take about a week or less and could earn the students 100 points. I had hoped this would force students to pay attention in class and prepare them for the paper we are going to write which analyzes one of the characters . . .

I was surprised by the uproar my plan caused in third hour. they thought that they wouldn't be getting all of the story that way . . .

This experience let me baffled and depressed. I had tried to do what I felt was the best course considering the circumstances. Oh well, time will tell if this plan works or is a bust.

Summary and Conclusions

A constant-comparative analysis of the data suggested that the developing practice of novice language arts teachers is dominated by concern for positive, caring interpersonal relationships with both students and colleagues; constraints of the student-teacher role in failing to wrest classroom ownership from the cooperating teacher, the necessity of experience in becoming a real teacher; the unique instructional challenge that a

language arts teacher faces; and the rhythm of the school year that drives an instructional pace characterized by thematic units and activities. Time plays a role in each theme.

Being dropped into the middle of the plot is a shock, literally a dramatic event, especially in a time-bound instructional, social, and cultural setting like school. Consequently, time may take on over-important status for student- or intern-teachers who are trying to make sense of a teaching-learning environment. It is critical to note that the interns identified time not only as a problem in instructional planning, e.g., filling the hour, cramming two centuries of literature into a three week unit; developing positive interpersonal relationships with learners and colleagues, but the teaching-interns also identified time as a solution, or panacea. With time, experience will be gained, and with experience will come the confidence that beginning teachers lack. With time, intern teachers believe the rapport critical to interpersonal relationships can be established. With time comes control and orderliness. It also suggests that time, an important feature of the way schools, classrooms, and teachers function, is controlled by everyone except the pre-service teacher. The teacher preparation program determines the length of the experience, e.g., a 14-week internships, no more, no less. The cooperating teacher maintains either overt or covert control of the way instructional and curricular time is spent.

The case study of Chris provides a contrast to the other

seven case studies and a means to illustrate time as both problem and solution. While the data collected from Chris' intern-teaching experience contributed to and built the same major themes as the cases of other intern teachers in the study, i.e., wanting ownership and responsibility for the teaching setting, concern for interpersonal relationships, and the importance of experience in learning to teach, the way Chris identified, defined, and solved problems was different. Due to a change in the placement, Chris began a speech and forensics teaching internship almost one week late. The only irritation or disruption of an untimely start (a potentially extreme instance of in medias res) was Chris' disappointment in various placement offices and officials of their handling her situation. She did not identify time as a variable affecting her development of responsibility for the classroom or ownership of the classroom, the establishment of rapport (which Chris identified as crucial to counter act the vulnerability speech students find themselves), and in gaining experience. This level of analysis should not suggest that intern teaching was challenge-free for Chris. Although conflicts arose in the cooperating teacher/intern-teacher relationship, Chris and the cooperating teacher identified specific problem sources and worked together to find solutions. Time was not one of the problem sources.

Additional analyses, using Schon's (1983, 1987) reflection-in-action model, suggested that Chris' ability to set and solve problems was a striking contrast to the problem setting and

solving of other student-interns, particularly in their identification, perhaps mistakenly, of time as both a problem and a solution.

It is inappropriate to draw statistical conclusions from the individual and pattern-matching case studies undertaken here. The research approach utilized methods of ethnographic inquiry, e.g., the representation of participants' perspectives collected by in depth interviewing and what Yin (1989) terms a distinctly qualitative inquiry approach--approaching a research problem without a priori theories. The investigation from which the data reported here are taken presents a detailed picture of a cohort group, language arts student-interns, selected purposively.

It is not inappropriate, however, to make analytic generalizations specific to language arts teachers in training (Yin, 1989). Important to analytic generalization in the teacher thinking literature is evidence of parallel kinds of studies in other teaching fields, e.g., investigations by Cornett (1986) and Wilson (1986) of social studies teachers, Yinger's ethnographic study of planning (1977) which focused on a first and second grade teacher, investigations conducted by Leinhardt and Smith (1985) and Steinberg, Haymore, and Marks (1985) on subject matter knowledge in mathematics instruction. Based on the analytic conclusions of this study, and supported by the teacher thinking research base, four specific sets of propositions are tenable.

Proposition 1: Results of this study support other findings (Clark & Yinger, 1979; Cornett, 1986; Yinger, 1977) which suggest

that teachers conceptualize instructional plans through units of study, not behavioral objectives. It should not be surprising that the planning of novice teachers in particular, is characterized overwhelmingly by references to time. Pre-professional training, particularly field placements, must acknowledge the reality of social and cultural factors in the teaching-learning environment, and the considerable effect of time on the way novice language arts teachers think and plan.

Given the nature of language arts--literature, composition, grammar, speech/forensics, it is possible that unit planning, ranging from two-to-three weeks to six week units, is more prevalent for this subject area since planning for instruction focuses around a novel, a term paper, a play, or a type of public speaking. This suggests a unique characterization of the language arts by novice language arts teachers. Would novice math or computer science teachers describe their fields similarly? In this study, participants characterized the language arts as being more difficult to teach than they thought math or science would be. Conversely, the weight of earlier research evidence (e.g., Clark & Yinger, 1979; Yinger, 1977) seems to suggest that time and the planning of instruction by units of study is a valid characterization of the instructional process across grade and content area.

Proposition 2: Models of reflective teaching (Cruickshank, Kennedy, Williams, Holton, & Fay, 1981; Korthagen, 1985) and reflection-in-action (Schon, 1983, 1987) proliferate. Taking the

time or building the time into field experiences to have opportunities to grow in the knowledge of teaching by sharing and reflecting appears crucial if field experiences are to have impact. It is not just the pre-service teacher who needs training and time to reflect, however. It is an untested assumption that cooperating teachers, ostensibly selected for their proven competence or expertise in teaching elementary or secondary students, know how to talk with teachers in training, or know how to verbalize how they plan or instruct (Kleinsasser, 1988). Zeichner, Tabachnick and Densmore (1987) charge that pre-service education, the unstudied problem that Sarason, Davidson, and Blatt (1962) described over 25 years ago remains a research problem despite much study:

> ...and they [studies] have provided even less information about how the knowledge and skills communicated to prospective teachers during training are received and are incorporated in to the perspectives of teachers (p. 26).

It is futile to investigate the effect of field experiences on teachers in training without including the way supervising and cooperating teachers verbalize the teaching-learning process and how they affect and are affected by student- or intern-teachers.

Proposition 3: The research base examining the effects of field experiences such as student-teaching or intern-teaching is mixed at best (See Lanier and Little, 1986, for a summary of the literature.). Eliminating or replacing field experiences provides one solution to breaking the rite-of-passage and the handing-down of powerful myths that permeate pre-service field

experiences, e.g., "all it takes is a little time", "things will be different when you're in your own classroom". A blanket elimination of extended field experiences is probably as inappropriate as suggesting that every prospective teacher must complete the same field experience, i.e., length and number of times in classrooms. In light of the current research base which is less than conclusive, recommendations by powerful lobbies like The Holmes Group (1986, 1988) that support extended field experiences need to be evaluated carefully.

Proposition 4: On the one hand, institutions like schools are amorphous, slow to change, and multi-layered, particularly with respect to technical control, e.g., scheduling, room assignment, hierarchical decision-making (Zeichner, Tabachnick, & Densmore, 1987). On the other hand, an institution like school can be described as having identifiable, unique parts e.g., outstanding individual efforts and exemplary programs. The narrative of teaching, in the voice of teachers, is one powerful way for researchers and practitioners to better understand the process of schooling and the role of teachers in the process.

Lampert (1984) points out that teacher narrative can establish a support or communication network outside of school for pre-service teachers. By talking about their craft and having it acknowledged as real by a research community that has traditionally cut itself off from practice, the narrative of teaching validates the reasons people become teachers: having impact on other persons' lives and their learning. A documen-

tation of the perspectives of teachers during various phases of career development creates meaning not confusion, particularly when the narrative begins in the middle of things.

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Table 1

Thematic Summary of the Case Studies.

Anne:
a) The humanity of teaching: building and modeling positive interpersonal relationships;
b) Ambiguity: English curriculum versus student self concept building; deference to the cooperating teacher's ownership of the classroom versus implementing her own style of management and instruction; gaining experience versus disappointment in the placement;
c) Time and the rhythm of school;
d) Non-teaching priorities.

Chris:
a) Ownership and responsibility for the teaching setting;
b) Caring, cooperation among students, and growth of group rapport;
c) Growth of self awareness;
d) The importance of experience in learning to teach
e) Effective planning and teaching practices.

Greaser:
a) Respect for and deference to the cooperating teacher's experience
b) Caring about students and developing positive relationships with them;
c) The rhythm of instruction--units, weeks, days, the instruction hour;
d) Language arts planning and evaluation;
e) Classroom management, discipline, and organization.

Ilsa:
a) Interpersonal relationships;
b) Teaching as performance;
c) Planning and gaining experience through trial and error;
d) The legitimacy of classroom-created knowledge;
e) Teacher ownership and independence in the classroom.

Linus:
a) Gaining confidence through experience;
b) A love of the subject matter and a desire to teach it;
c) Constraints of the student teacher role;
d) Attitude, or the teacher role.

Table 1 (continued)

Sean:
a) Developing and maintaining a positive interpersonal relationship with students;
b) Making the study of English, a low priority for students, as pleasant as possible;
c) Gaining instructional experience through trial and error to find out what will work in the classroom;
d) Acknowledging a teacher's unique, neither right not wrong approach to teaching English;
e) Tacit knowledge of teaching.

Simon:
a) Imagination and creativity in teaching;
b) Teaching English: organization, planning, evaluation, and expectations;
c) The press of time and the rhythm of school;
d) The student teacher role;
e) Teaching as personal involvement.

Terry:
a) Interpersonal relationships;
b) Implementing a unique teaching style;
c) Ownership and responsibility for the classroom;
d) Time pressures and the rhythm of school;
e) Gaining experience;
f) The character of teaching language arts at the senior high level.

Table 2

Themes Emerging from Pattern-Matching the Case Studies.

A. The task of becoming a real teacher:
   1. Classroom ownership/constraints of the student teacher role
   2. Gaining experience

B. Interpersonal relationships:
   1. Positive interpersonal relationships, caring, and rapport
   2. Making language arts fun
   3. Literature and composition as subjective, different from math or science content

C. Curriculum and Instruction--planning driven by time:
   1. The rhythm of school, constraints of time, instructional pacing (technical control)
   2. Planning by thematic units, activities, daily plans